THE
Life and Adventures
OF
AMBROSE GWINETT,

Well known to the Public, as the lame Beggar-man, who for many years ſwept the way, between the *Meuſe-Gate* and *Spring-Gardens, Charing Croſs*.

Taken almoſt literally from his own mouth.

Giving an Account of his Parentage, and being put out to an Attorney at Canterbury, with whom he lived four Years, when he obtain'd his maſter's conſent to viſit his ſiſter who was marry'd and lived near Deal, but not being uſed to travelling he was greatly fatigu'd and got a lodging within three miles of his ſiſter's, by mentioning her name; the Landlady prevailed on her uncle, to let him have half his bed, which he paid for that night, and departed early in the morning, and arrived at his ſiſter's, with whom and his brother-in-law he breakfaſted, and in an hour or two after came the landlord of the houſe where he had lodged, charging him with the murder of his bedfellow, for which he was committed, and at the aſſizes at Maidſtone, condemned, and order'd to be hung in Chains, which was accordingly executed, and a boy going to fetch his cows ſee his Jaw move, and went and acquainted his maſter, who with aſſiſtants cut down the gibbet, and diſengaging him from his irons, put him into a warm bed, by which he recover'd and was ſent abroad, where he met with the very man for whoſe ſuppoſed murder he had been executed; and who gave a ſurpriſing relation of the many accidents that had befel him. Their mutual agreement to return to England together, &c.

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THE LIFE, &c.

I Was born of reputable parents in the city of Canterbury, where my father, living at the ſign of the Blue anchor, dealt in ſlops. He had but two children, a daughter and myſelf, and having given me a good ſchool education, at the age of ſixteen he bound me apprentice to Mr. George Roberts, an Attorney in our town, with whom I ſtayed four years and three quarters to his great content and my own ſatisfaction. So that had we been together till my time was up, I have great reaſon to believe he would have taken me into partnerſhip; but, God's will be done, my unfortunate ſtars decreed otherwiſe.

My ſiſter being come to woman's eſtate, had now been married ſomething more than a twelve-month to one Sawyer, a ſeafaring man, who having got conſiderable prizes, my father alſo giving him 200l. with my ſiſter, quitted his profeſſion and ſet up a public houſe within three miles of the place of his nativity, which was Deal, in the county of Kent.

I had frequent invitations to go and paſs a ſhort time with them; and in the autumn of the year 1709, having obtained my maſter's conſent for that purpoſe, I left the city of Canterbury on foot, the 17th day of September.

Through

Through ſome unavoidable delays on the road, the evening was conſiderable advanced before I reached Deal; and ſo tired was I, being unus'd to that way of travelling, that, had my life depended on it, I could not get as far as my ſiſter's that night, ſhe living, as I have already ſaid three mile beyond the place. At this time there were many of her Majeſty Queen Anne's ſhips lying in the harbour, for the Engliſh were then at war with the French and Spaniards: beſides which, I found this was the day for holding the yearly fair, ſo that the town was filled to that degree, that a bed was not to be got for love or money. I went ſeeking a lodging from houſe to houſe, to no purpoſe, till, being quite ſpent, I returned to the public houſe where I had firſt made enquiry, deſiring leave to ſit by their kitchen fire, and reſt myſelf till morning.

The publican and his wife happened to be acquainted with my brother and ſiſter, and finding by my diſcourſe, that I was a relation of theirs and going to viſit them, the Landlady preſently ſaid ſhe would endeavour to get a bed; and going out of the kitchen ſhe quickly after called me into a parlour, that led from it. Here I ſaw ſitting by the fire-ſide a middle aged man in a night gown and cap, who was rekoning money at a table. "Uncle," ſaid the woman, as ſoon as I entered, "this is a brother of our friend Mrs Sawyer; he cannot get a bed any where, and is tired after a long journey. You are the only one that lies in this houſe alone, will you give him part of yours? To this the man, anſwered, that ſhe knew he had been out of order that he was blooded that day, and conſequently a bedfellow could not be very agreeable; "however, ſaid he, rather then the young man ſhall ſet up, he

is welcome to ſleep with me. After this we ſet a while together, when having put his money in a canvas bag, into the pocket of his night gown, he took the candle and I followed him up to bed.

How long I ſlept, I cannot exactly determine, but I conjecture it was about three o'clock the morning when I awakened with a violent cholic. I found my Chum awake as well as myſelf; he aſked me what was the matter; I informed him, and at the ſame time begged he would direct me to the neceſſary. He told me, when I was down ſtairs, I muſt turn on my right hand, and go ſtrait into the garden, at the end of which it was, juſt over the ſea, but, adds he, you may poſſibly find ſome difficulty in opening the door, the ſtring being broke which pulls up the latch. I will give you a penknife which you may open it with thro' a chink in the boards. So ſaying, he put his hand into his waiſtcoat pocket, which lay on him on the bed, and gave me a middling ſized penknife.

I hurried on a few of my cloaths, and went down ſtairs; but I muſt obſerve to you, that unclaſping the penknife to open the door of the neceſſary, according to his direction, a piece of money which ſtuck between the blade and the groove in the handle fell into my hand: I did not examine what it was, nor indeed could I well ſee, there being but a very faint moon light, ſo I put them together careleſsly in my pocket.

I apprehend I ſtaid in the garden pretty near a quarter of an hour. When I returned to the chamber, I was ſurprized to find my bedfellow gone: I called ſeveral times but receiving no anſwer, I went to bed, and again fell aſleep.

About

About ſix o'clock I aroſe, nobody yet being up in the houſe. The gentleman was not yet returned to bed, or, if he was, had again left it. I dreſt myſelf with what haſte I could, being impatient to ſee my ſiſter, and the reckoning being paid over night, I let myſelf out at the ſtreet door.

I will not trouble you with a relation of the kindneſs with which my ſiſter and her huſband received me. We breakfaſted together, and I believe it might be about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, when ſtanding at the door my brother in law being by my ſide, we ſaw three horſemen galloping towards us. As ſoon as they came up to the houſe, they ſtopt and one of them lighting, ſuddenly ſeized me by the collar, crying, You are King's priſoner. I deſired to know my crime. He ſaid I ſhould know that as ſoon as I came to Deal, where I muſt immediately go with them. One of them then told my brother that the night before I had committed a murder and robbery.

Reſiſtance would have proved as vain as my tears and proteſtations of my innocence. In a word, a warrant was produced, and I was carried back to Deal attended by the three men; my brother with another friend accompanyiug us, who knew not what to ſay for, nor how to comfort me.

Being arrived in town I was immediately hurried to the houſe where I had ſlept the proceeding night the maſter of which was one of the three men that came to apprehend me, though in my firſt hurry I did not recollect him. We were met at the door by a crowd of people, every one crying, Which is he? which is he? As ſoon as I entered, I was accoſted by the publican's wife in tears, O! curſed wretch, what haſt thou done? thou haſt murdered and rob-

bed

bed my poor dear uncle, and all through me who put thee to lie with him. But where haſt thou hid his money and what haſt thou done with his body? Thou ſhall be hanged on a gallows as high as a may pole. My brother begged her to be pacified, and I was taken into a private room. They then began to queſtion me as the woman had done, about where I had put the money, and how I had diſpoſed of the body. I aſked them what money, and whoſe body they meant. They then ſaid I had killed the perſon I had lain with the proceeding night, for the ſake of a large ſum I had ſeen with him. I fell down of upon my knees, calling God to witneſs, I knew nothing of what they accuſed me, Then ſomebody cried, Carry him up ſtairs, and I was brought into the chamber where I had ſlept. Here the man of the houſe went to the bed, and turning down the cloaths, ſhewed the ſheets, pillow and bolſter dyed in blood. He aſked me did I know any thing of that? I declared to God I did not. Says a perſon in the room, Young man ſomething very odd muſt have paſt here laſt night, for lying in the next chamber, I heard groanings, and going up and down ſtairs more than once or twice, I then told them the circumſtance of my illneſs, and that I had been up and down myſelf, with all that paſſed between my bedfellow and me. Somebody propoſed to ſearch me; ſeveral began to turn my pockets inſide out, and from my waiſtcoat tumbled the penknife and the piece of money I have already mentioned, and I had entirely forgot. Upon ſeeing theſe the woman immediately ſcreamed out, O God! there's my uncle's penknife! then taking up the money, and calling the people about her, Here, ſaid ſhe, is what puts the villain's guilt

beyond

beyond a doubt, I can ſwear to this William and Mary's guinea, my uncle has long had it by way of pocket piece, and engraved the firſt letters of his name upon it. She then began to cry afreſh, while I could do nothing but continue to call heaven to witneſs that I was as innocent as the child unborn. The conſtable who had heard me mention the having gone down into the garden, told the people I muſt have thrown the body down the neceſſary, and going thither, Here, ſaid he, after having cut the throat, he has let the body down into the ſea. This every body immediately aſſented to. Then, (ſaid the maſter of the houſe) it is in vain to look for the body any further, for there was a ſpring tide laſt night which has carried it off.

The conſequence of theſe proceedings was an immediate examination before a juſtice of peace; after which I ſuffered a long and rigorous impriſonment in the county town of Maidſtone. For ſome time, my father, my maſter and my relations were inclined to think me innocent, becauſe I declared I was ſo, as well I might, and in compliance with my earneſt requeſt, an advertiſement was publiſhed in the London Gazette, repreſenting my deplorable circumſtances, and offering a reward to any perſon who could give tidings of Mr. Richard Collings, (the man I was ſuppoſed to have murdered) either alive or dead. No information, however, of any kind came to hand, at the aſſizes therefore, I was brought up to my trial, and circumſtances appearing ſtrong againſt me, I received ſentence to be carried in a cart the Wedneſday fortnight following to the town of Deal, and there to be hanged before the Inn-keeper's door where I had committed the murder; after which I was to be hung in chains within a ſtone's throw of my brother's houſe.

Nothing could have ſupported me under this dreadful condemnation, but a conſciouſneſs of my not being guilty of the crime for which I was to ſuffer. My friends now began to conſider my declarations of my innocence, as perſiſting in falſhood to the perdition of my ſoul; many of them diſcontinued their enquiries after me, and thoſe few who ſtill came to viſit me, only came to urge me to confeſſion, but I was reſolved I would never die with a lie of that kind in my mouth.

The Monday was now arrived before the fatal day, when an end was to be put to my miſeries. I was called down into the court of the priſon, but I own I was not a little ſhocked, when I found it was to be taken meaſure of for my irons in which I was to be hung after execution. A fellow priſoner appeared before me in the ſame woful plight, (he had robbed the mail) and the Smith was meaſuring him when I came down; while tha Goaler, with as much calmneſs as if he had been ordering a pair of ſtays for his daughter, was giving directions in what manner the irons ſhould be made, ſo as to ſupport the man who was remarkably heavy and corpulent.

Between this and the day of execution, I ſpent my time alone in prayer and meditation.

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At length Wedneſday morning came, and about three o'clock I was put in a cart, but ſure ſuch a day of wind, rain and thunder, never blew out of the heavens, and when we arrived at Deal, it became ſo violent, that the Sheriff and his Officers, could ſcarce ſit their horſes: for my own part, I was inſenſible to every object about me: I therefore heard the Sheriff whiſper the Executioner to make what diſpatch he could, without the leaſt emotion, and ſuffered him to tuck me up like a log of wood, unconſcious of what he was doing.

I can give no account of what I felt when hanging, only remember, after being turned off, ſomething appeared about me like a blaze of fire, nor do I know how long I hung, no doubt the violence of the weather favoured me greatly in that circumſtance. What I am now going to tell you, I learned from my brother, which was, that having hung half an hour, the Sheriff's officers all went off, and I was cut down by the Executioner; but when he came to put the irons upon me, it was found that the irons of the other man which were too large for me, had been ſent inſtead of mine: this they remedied by ſtuffing rags between my body and the hoops, after which I was taken to the place appointed and hung on a gibbet which was ready prepared.

The cloth over my face being ſlightly tied, was ſoon detached by the wind, and probably its blowing on my face expedited my recovery, certain is, that in this ſituation I came to myſelf.

The gibbet was placed at one corner of a field, where my fitter's cows ran, and about this time a lad came to drive them home for evening milking. The creatures which were feeding almoſt under me, brought him near the gibbet, and in the very mo-

ment he looked up, ſaw me open my eyes and move my under jaw. He immediately ran home to inform the people at his maſter's. At firſt they made ſome difficulty to believe his ſtory, at length, my brother come out, and by the time he got to the field, I was ſo much alive, that my groans were very audible.

In their confuſion, the firſt thing they thought of was a ladder. One of my brother's men, mounted and putting his hand to my ſtomach felt my heart beating ſtrongly. But it was found impoſſible to detach me from the gibbet, without cutting it down. A ſaw was got for that purpoſe, and in leſs than half an hour, having freed me from my irons, they got me blooded and put in a warm bed.

It is amazing, that tho' above eight perſons was entruſted with this tranſaction, and I remained three days in the p'ace after it happened, not one betrayed the ſecret. Early next morning it was known the gibbet was cut down, and it occurred to every body that it was done by my relations, to put a veil over their ſhame, by burying the body, but when my brother was ſummoned to the Mayor's houſe, in order to be queſtioned, and he denied knowing any thing of the matter, little more ſtir was made about it, becauſe he was reſpected by all the neighbouring gentlemen, and in ſome meaſure, becauſe I perſiſted in being innocent of the fact for which I ſuffered.

Thus was I delivered from an ignominious death but how was I to diſpoſe of my life now I had regained it. To ſtay in England was impoſſible, without expoſing myſelf to the terrors of the law. In this dilemma a fortunate circumſtance occurred. There had lain at my brother's houſe, ſome of the principal Officers of a privateer that was preparing

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for a cruize, and juſt then ready to ſail. The captain offered to take me aboard with him, and proper neceſſaries being provided for me, my ſiſter giving me ten guineas in my pocket, recommended me to the protection of God and the worthy Commander, who received me in the light of his Clerk, and a ſort of Under-aſſiſtant to his Purſer.

We had been ſix months out upon our cruize, having had but indifferent ſucceſs, when being on the coaſt of Florida, then in the hands of the Spaniards, we fell in with a ſquadron of their men of war; and being conſequently taken without ſtriking a ſtroke, were all brought priſoners into the harbour of St. Helen's. I was really tired of my life, and ſhould have been glad to have ended it in the dungeon, where, with forty others of my countrymen, the enemy had put me; but after three years confinement, we were let out, in order to be put on board tranſports, to be conveyed to Pennſylvania, and from thence to England. This was a diſagreeable ſentence to me, taking it for granted, that a return home would be a return to the gallows. Being therefore, a tolerable maſter of the Spaniſh language, I ſolicited to be left behind; which favour I obtained, by means of the maſter of the priſon and he not only took me into his houſe, as ſoon as my countrymen were gone, but, in a ſhort time, procured me a ſmall ſalary from the Governor, for being his Deputy.

Indeed, at this particular time the office was by no means agreeable. The coaſt had been long infeſted with pirates, the moſt deſperate gang of villains that can be imagined; and ſcarce a month paſſed, but one or other of their veſſels fell into the Governor's hands, and the crew as conſtantly was

put under my care. Once I very narrowly eſcaped being knocked on the head by one of the ruffians, and having the keys took from me: Another time I was ſhot at. It is true, in both caſes the perſons ſuffered for their attempt, and in the laſt, I thought a little too cruelly; for the perſon that let off the carabine, was not only put to the torture to confeſs his accomplices, but afterwards broke on the wheel where he was left to expire, the moſt ſhocking ſpectacle I ever beheld.

I had been in my office about three months, when a ſhip arrived from Port Royal, another Spaniſh ſettlement on the coaſt, and nine Engliſh priſoners on board. I was ſtanding in the ſtreet as they were coming up from the port, to the Governor's houſe. I thought ſomething ſtruck me, in the face of one of the priſoners, that I had before been acquainted with. I could not then ſtop them for us to ſpeak together; but in about an hour after, they were all brought to the priſon, there to be lodged till the Governor ſignified his further pleaſure.

As ſoon as the poor creatures found I was an Engliſhman, they were extremely happy, even in their diſtreſſed ſituation, though indeed they were treated with lenity enough, and only ſent to the priſon till a lodging could be provided for them; they having been in the courſe of the War, made priſoners as well as myſelf, and then on their return home. I now had an opportunity of taking notice of the man whoſe face I thought I knew, and I was more and more confirmed that I was not miſtaken. And I verily thought, that this was the man, for whoſe ſuppoſed murder I ſuffered ſo much in England, and the thought being ſtrong in my head, I could not ſleep all night.

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The morning after their arrival, I told them, that if any of them had a mind to go about the town I would procure them permiſſion, and go with them. This man ſaid he would go, and it was as I wiſhed. Three other priſoners that went along with us, walked a little in advance. I then took the opportunity, and looking in his face, Sir, ſaid I, was you ever at Deal? I believe, he, at that inſtant had ſome recollection of me; for, putting his hand on my ſhoulder, tears burſt into his eyes. Sir, ſaid I, if you are the man I take you for, you here ſee before you one of the moſt unfortunate of human kind; Sir, is your name Richard Collins? He replied, Yes. Then cried I, I was hanged and gibbeted upon your account in England.

After our firſt ſalutation and mutual ſurprize in meeting being over, he made me give him a circumſtantial detail of every thing that happened to me in England, from the moment we parted. I never ſaw any man expreſs ſuch concern as he did, while I was purſuing my melancholy adventures; but, when I came to the circumſtance of my being hanged, and afterwards hung in chains, I could hardly prevail upon him to believe my relation, till backed by the moſt ſolemn aſſeverations, pronounced in the moſt ſerious manner. When I had done, Well, ſaid he, young man, (for I was then but in my 23th year, Mr. Collins might be about three and forty) if you have ſuſtained misfortunes on my account, do not imagine (though I cannot lay them at your door) that I have been without my ſufferings. God knows my heart, I am moſt exceedingly ſorry for the injuſtice that has been done you; but the ways of providence are unſearchable. He then informed me by what accident all my troubles had been brought about.

When you left me in bed, ſaid he, having at firſt waked with an oppreſſion I could not account for, I found myſelf exceedingly ſick and weak, I groaned and ſighed, and thought myſelf going to die, when, accidentally putting my hand to my left arm, in which I had been blooded the morning before, I found my ſhirt wet, and in ſhort, that the bandage having ſlipped, the orifice was again opened, and a great flux of blood enſued. This immediately accounted for the condition I found myſelf in. I thought however, I would not diſturb the family, which had gone to bed very late, I therefore muſtered all my ſtrength and got up, with my night-gown looſe about me, in order to go to a neighbouring barber, who had bled me, and have him to tie up my arm. He lived directly oppoſite to our houſe: but when I got in the ſtreet, and croſſed the way, in order to knock at his door, a band of men armed with cutlaſſes and hangers, came and ſeized me, and hurried me to the beach. I begged and prayed, but they ſoon ſilenced my cries, by clapping a gag in my mouth. At firſt, I took them for a preſs gang, though I ſoon found they were a gang of ruffians belonging to a privateer, aboard which they immediately brought me. But before I got thither, loſs of blood occaſioned me to faint away. The ſurgeon of the ſhip, I ſuppoſe, tied up my arm; for when my ſenſes returned, I found myſelf in a hammock, and ſomebody feeling my pulſe. The veſſel being then under way, I aſked where I was? They ſaid I was ſafe enough. I immediately called for my night gown, it was brought me, but of a conſiderable ſum of money that was in the pocket of it, I could get no account. I complained to the captain of the violence that had been done

done me, and of the robbery his men had committed, but he laughed at me, and ſaid I ſhould ſoon have prize money enough to make me amends, ſo I was obliged to ſubmit; and for three months they forced me to work before the maſt. At laſt we met the ſame fate that you did, and by adventures parallel to your own, you ſee me here on my return to our native country, and if you will accompany me, I ſhall think myſelf happy.

There was nothing to prevent my going to England, and the ſhip being to ſail in ten days, in it Mr. Collins and I determined to embark. I told my maſter my reſolution, he did not diſuade me from it, becauſe it gave him the opportunity of getting the office I held to a kinſman of his, to whom that very day I delivered up my truſt. And here providence was no leſs remarkable to me than in other particulars of my life, for that night the pirates ſeized on the young man, while locking up the wards, took the keys from him, and left him for dead, and before the alarm could be given, five of them made their eſcape, by means of piratical boats that kept hovering about the coaſt.

On the 18th of November, 1712, having made all my little preparations, I ſent my trunk aboard the Noſtra Senora, Michael Deronza, maſter. The veſſel was to ſail that evening, and about ſeven o'clock being ſitting with Signor Gaſpar, my maſter a lad came up and ſaid the boat had been waiting for me and that Mr. Collins was on board. I ran into the houſe for a ſmall bundle and taking leave of the family, made what haſte I could to the quay but found the boat had put off, and left word I ſhould overtake them at a little bay. I ran along the ſhore, and imagined I had a ſight of the boat, and

hallooed

hallooed as loud as I could; they answered and put about to take me in: but we had scarce got fifty yards from land, when, on looking for Mr. Collins, I missed him; and then I found that instead of getting aboard my own boat, which I could see a considerable way a-head, I had got into a boat belonging to the pirates. I attempted to leap overboard, but was prevented by one of the crew, who gave me a stroke on the head, which laid me senseless; and I found afterwards they mistook me for one of their men, who had been sent to purchase something in the town.

With these Pirates I continued some years, till they, upon a dispute, threw me overboard. I was saved by a boat belonging to a Spanish ship. After various misfortunes, our ship was taken by an Algerine Rover, the greatest part of the crew was killed, and the rest taken prisoners, among which I was one, having lost one of my legs in the action.

After this, I passed a long and painful slavery in Algiers, till with other English captives, I was released by agreement between the Dey of Algiers, and his Brittanick Majesty, In the year 1730. I returned to England. The first thing I did was to enquire after my relations, but all those nearest to me were dead; and I found Mr. Collins had never returned home, so I suppose he died in his passage. Though not an old man, I was so enfeebled by hardships, that I was unable to work, and being without any manner of support, I could think of no way of getting any living but by begging.

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